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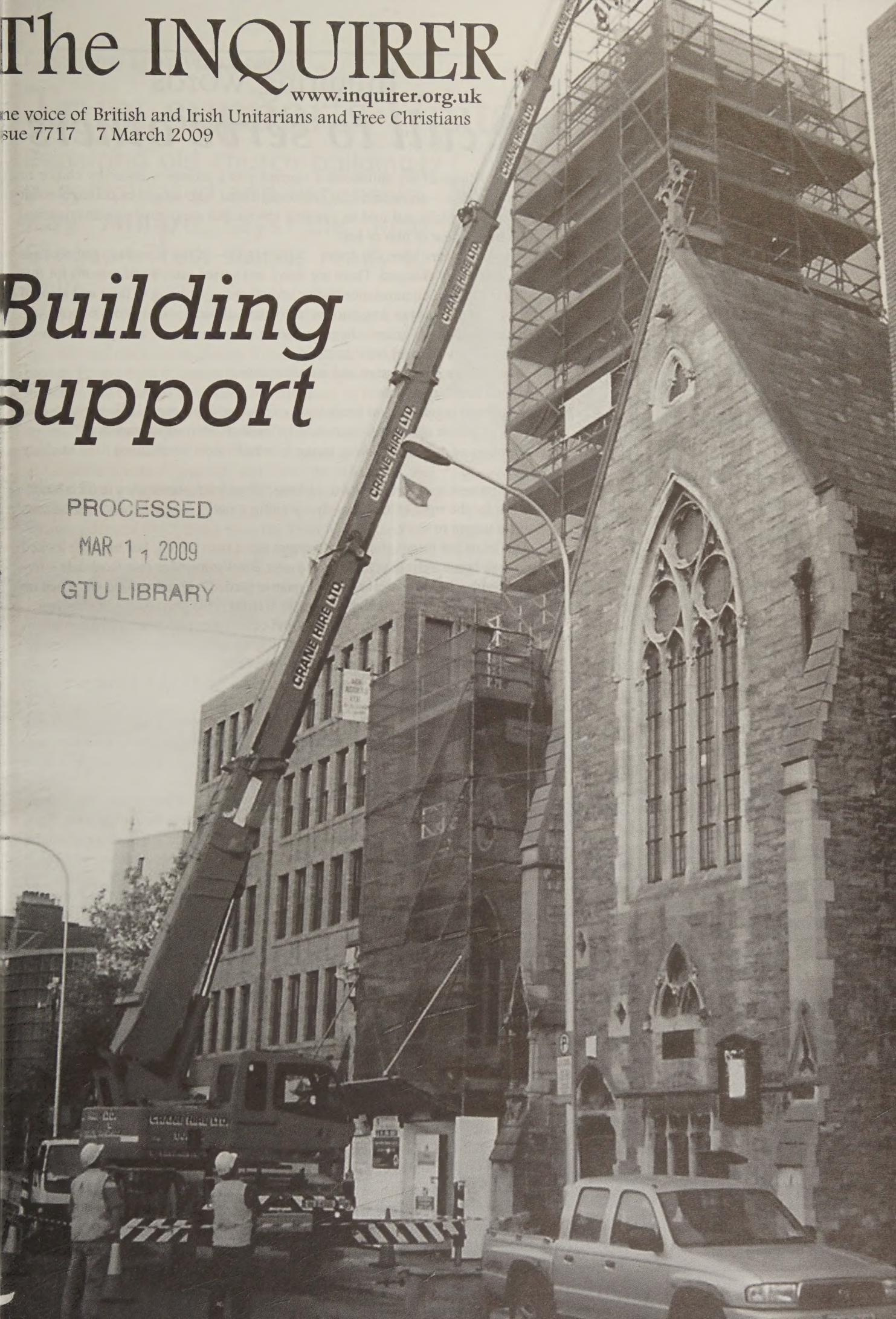
The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians
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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring
religion through the worship of
God and the celebration of life; the
service of humanity and respect for
all creation; and the upholding of the
liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the
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Inquiring Words A call to serve others

In the village of my childhood a vagrant was a recluse – either by choice or circumstance – an eccentric, a respected friend who taught us children about the stars at night and told us exciting stories that captivated our imagination. We had no fear of him or her.

Sixty-plus years later, the scene – now plight – of the homeless and roofless has drastically changed. There are many and varied causes and reasons for this – be it personal circumstance and/or addictions – gambling or drug and alcohol abuse. And let us not forget today's Western affluent social and economic climate. The rich get richer – the poor-poorer.

Many (of my friends) are victims of:

Debt – house repossession and accommodation

Mental health problems

Family estrangement and breakdown of relationships, especially marital

Lack of prison after-care – particularly for short term ex-offenders

Members of our armed forces trying to rebuild their traumatised lives in civvy street

Asylum seekers, here in Britain, seeking refuge from persecution in their homelands for the right of free speech – waiting months for recognition as citizens and a permit to work.

And let us not forget grief – many years ago a man having lost his wife locked up their home in Halifax and walked over Blackstone edge into Rochdale – living rough – he daily cleaned up our manse garden – refusing food etc. Then he was gone – back to unlock his home in Halifax – his period of grieving over. What right have we to judge reasons and causes for rooflessness and homelessness? Many families live in B&B's waiting for accommodation at the councils' expense and their family – children's – welfare.

For me, (a minister of religion), "There, but for the Grace of God go I – and any one my loved ones."

But what can we do to address the increasing problem – and it is a problem – more so, as I have found in retirement, in our provincial towns than the inner cities? Inner cities address the problem by having day/night centres with food and shelter, advice and opportunities for rehabilitation.

Here, in Kidderminster, a provincial town, we have nightly rough sleepers using our secluded premises for shelter, sleep and a refuge for their necessities – including an under-the-stars lavatory. And I know that if we have a bad winter – unless they get up at 4am and walk – we will find a corpse in the morning.

Our nearest Day Centre and Winter Night Shelter/Hostel is in Worcester – 15 miles away – the only refuge, except for young people, in the whole of Worcestershire. We can, and will, as a caring church community, buy a rough sleeper a train or bus ticket to Worcester or Birmingham. But is this enough?

At this point in their lives, many of them are not so motivated to get there. Maybe now is the time for churches – of all denominations and faiths – together with community charities and council authorities – to address this social and political problem. Together – locally – and not leave it all to national government policy and inner city concern.

Unitarians, historically, have always – locally, nationally – been in the forefront of social concern and care-local and national.

This is our history.

Can we not continue this with the concerns of today and care for – help to rehabilitate – the victims of today in our affluent society – both nationally and in our local areas.

There are charitable organisations in our localities that can prepare and train us for this.

It is a scary and difficult area of concern – but we are Unitarians and our forebears rose to their commitment, concern and belief – in spite of everything. Shouldn't we – all of us – do the same?

– *The Rev Ann Latham, minister at Kidderminster.*

Gregson is revitalised

Trust supports Unitarian churches

Repairing old church buildings is complicated and expensive.

Kay Millard says the John Gregson Trust stands ready to help.

It is more than 50 years since Mrs Amy Howarth and Mrs Sybil Dobson founded a trust in memory of their uncle, John Gregson, who had made a considerable fortune in South Africa as a banker. From an old Unitarian family, John Gregson was born in Bolton and returned there after his retirement. In his will he stipulated that one half of his estate should be given to a charity that his nieces were to determine. They decided on a trust that would assist with the repair and conservation of the fabric of Unitarian places of worship, and asked the trustees of the Hibbert Trust (which specifically excludes work on buildings) to add the John Gregson Trust to their portfolio. The Trust became active in 1957. Since then, the Trust has assisted numerous historic Unitarian chapels and meeting houses.*



The work of the Trust, now boosted financially by donations from Charles Booth and an anonymous donor, has taken on a new lease of life following the appointment of Mark Pearce as a trustee. Mark, a Manchester architect specialising in the conservation of non-conformist chapels, has become chair of a small buildings sub-committee that not only reviews applications but tries to be proactive in encouraging chapels to follow good practice.

An example of this has been to extend

grants where necessary to chapels that need to have a survey, but struggle to find the cost. This is often the case where a chapel is also applying to English Heritage for funding. The Trust has now set aside funding for a limited number of grants specifically for surveys to be carried out.

The Trust has also recently inaugurated emergency grants. These are comparatively small, but money can be made available quickly. One chapel had to close just before Christmas when asbestos in the basement was uncovered by an electrician; another has had to deal with dry rot before it spreads; there is always the risk of water ingress from roofs in bad weather. These are situations the Trust can help with at short notice.



At Unitarian Meeting, Bristol, the Gregson Trust supported repairs to the front elevation and parapet. The glass doors were designed by environmental artist Richard Long – a heritage for the future.

Regular grants continue, of course, with applications accepted twice each year. The work supported can be anything from a complete conservation programme with major funding from English Heritage, to replacing guttering or re-glazing a stained glass window. Provided the work is repair, rather than new services or routine maintenance, the Trust will be happy to consider it. While the grants usually only cover part of the cost, they are often useful not just for the sum of money awarded, but as evidence to other potential funders that the denomination to which the congregation belongs is doing what it can.

More details, and an application form, can be found on the Trust's website at www.thejohngregsontrust.org.uk. Alternatively, talk to the Secretary, Kay Millard, on 01 373 827 856, or e-mail her on kay.millard@btinternet.com.

* Ruston, Alan (1984): *The Hibbert Trust – a History*; London, The Hibbert Trust.



Windows, especially if they are of stained glass, can be very expensive to restore – this one at the Chapel in Newport Iow is an important Victorian example, also helped by the Trust.

Better than an hour under the duvet

Worship at the Unitarian General Assembly meetings attracts early risers – including **Linda Hart**, who plans to be there even if she might rather be back in a warm bed.

I am not an early riser. I'm not the sort to greet the dawning day with bright eyes and an energetic spirit. Give me a few cups of tea and by around 9.30 and I'm ready to be civil.

Which is why it was surprising to see me at each of the morning worship services held at the Annual Meetings last year. I simply don't do mornings. But as a member of the Worship Panel, I felt it was important to be there to support the worship leaders, and to set a good example. So up I got and went along each morning, a bit groggy, but determined.

Three mornings in a row I went and at each of the very different worship services, I discovered that which I always hope to find in worship: moments of quiet and reflection, voices joined in singing, insight and challenge, and the discovery again and again and again of our common path and our common faith.

This is not to say that the services were anything alike. Not for a moment. Each was distinct in its voice and in the intention of the leaders. Andy Pakula invited us to share our journeys with another person allowing more interaction. (Let me note here that I am of the usual disposition to avoid such opportunities – I get twitchy when asked to turn and talk to someone in worship. Yet I admit that I was moved by sharing with my neighbour, and that I went into that day with a feeling of affirmation and connection that I rarely find at meetings like

the GA.)

The Rev Csaba Todor invited us into a time of silence and reflection that went deep into my heart. His still presence, and the beauty of his prayers offered a time in which the stirrings of my heart could emerge. His wife Eva's voice lifted me as she sang in her native Hungarian. Again, the day began with an unexpected nourishment.

The final morning worship began with panic. I awoke somewhat late and had to hurry out the door of my room five minutes later than I had intended. I sped along the path to the centre where the worship would be held only to find the closest doors locked firm. Dashing around the circumference of the building, I made it inside with only minutes to spare, but was greeted with a smile and welcome at the door of the room where worship would take place. Led by the Rev Jeff Gould, who was assisted by others, I came into the presence of Jesus and was invited to join in a traditional Christian communion. The words spoken, the hymns we sang and the action of sharing bread and wine are not a common part of my worship life, but the warmth of the gathering and the ability to affirm my own faith and the faith of my companions in our wider movement one more time started my day renewed and restored.

I will be there each morning again this year, and there are at least two reasons for going. The first is that I don't often get the chance to simply be in worship. As a minister, I rarely have the opportunity to participate by sitting in the congregation. And as much as I love leading worship, I miss the nourishment of being led through a service. So, when the opportunity presents itself – even at an ungodly early hour – I want to take advantage of it, to stock up for the long months when I don't have that chance.

More importantly, though, I'll be there to affirm and celebrate the diversity of our religious community. We note with appropriate pride that we are a diverse movement, but sometimes find it more difficult to live out our appreciation of diversity. Whether it is a reluctance to join in a more pluralistic approach or an aversion borne of a Christianity of our past, it is a denial of a treasured and important – defining even – characteristic of our denomination and religious movement: the belief that there are many paths that bring us to an encounter with what is of ultimate value, and that even though we may be divided in our practices, still we are united in our ongoing search for what can guide us in our living a life of integrity and purpose.

I hope you'll join me there at the diverse worship opportunities at the General Assembly meetings. I'll be there – yawning, no doubt, and longing a little for my warm bed. But there, affirming that we are indeed joined together in a common search, joined in our common faith. I'll be there to explore and experience and rejoice in the diverse expressions of that faith.

The Rev Linda Hart is minister of Richmond and Putney Unitarian Church.



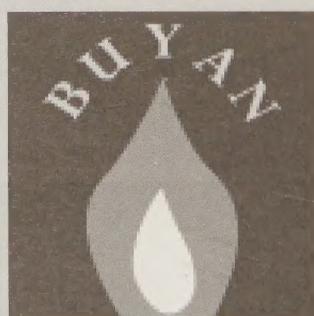
The Rev Linda Hart

BUYAN plans to chill out

The British Unitarian Young Adult Network (BUYAN), the national Unitarian community for 18-35 year-olds, plans a "Chill Out Weekend" on 27-29 March. The weekend will be intentionally left without a heavy timetable of activities. There will be some outdoor activities and one spiritual workshop, but the rest of the time will be left open as a time to relax, socialise and take in the beautiful Shropshire countryside.

The venue is a youth hostel with dormitories (BUYAN booked the whole building) near Much Wenlock, Shropshire. The cost of the weekend is £50 and bursaries are available if money represents a barrier to participation. For more information contact Claire Maddocks pigginclaire@hotmail.com Applications and additional information can be found at www.unitarian.org.uk/shortterm/stokes_farm_buyan.pdf

Please pass on this information to anyone in this age range.



– Stephen Lingwood Minister, Bank Street Unitarian Chapel, Bolton

Butterflies fluttered by in Box

When snow prevented **Rebecca Richards** driving her daughter Amy the 174 miles from rural Wiltshire to Great Hucklow, she devised a 'Junior Weekend' just for two.

Amy's first Junior Weekend in October had been a roaring success with her loving every moment of it. When booking forms arrived for the February weekend these were completed and posted within 48 hours and the flyer sat beside Amy's bed.

On the Friday before Junior Weekend I collected Amy from school and at various points during the evening we calculated where we'd be the following Friday. On the Monday before Junior Weekend it snowed heavily in London and Box enjoyed dusting of snow. By Wednesday I was checking the BBC website for the weather forecast in Buxton. Although the forecast didn't look too bad, I started gently, suggesting to Amy that there was a chance that we would not be able to go to Junior Weekend if the weather was too bad. On Thursday morning we woke up to heavy blanket of snow. Schools were shut and the roads out of the village terrifying so we spent an enjoyable day at home. Amy mused at times about the prospects for Junior Weekend and I started to indicate that it didn't look as if it would be sensible to attempt the journey but we'd see on Friday. At 9 o'clock on Friday morning with schools still closed and various local A-roads shut we took the decision that we wouldn't be venturing to Derbyshire. As a Southerner I couldn't quite cope with the fact that had we managed to travel north we would have found significantly better weather conditions!

Amy was brave throughout the day but at bedtime was quite tearful and concerned about the fact that her friend Lauren would be sleeping in a room at Hucklow on her own – Amy doesn't actually do the bed plan but having shared with Lauren last time, she assumed she'd be sharing with her again! I went downstairs and found the coloured pens and wrote out the programme for 'Junior Weekend in Box'. One of the two



Arts and crafts are always an important part of Junior Weekend.

participants was technically underage but with a ratio of two leaders to two participants we felt we could undertake this responsibility.

The programme was the first thing Amy found when she awoke in the morning and she came through to the Leaders' room beaming. Obviously one has to dress before breakfast at Junior Weekend and such protocols were strictly followed. (We even had milk in a milk jug to pour over our cereal – amazing the subtleties that distinguish Hucklow from home!)

The theme of the weekend was 'butterflies' – not highly creative or seasonal but we had to work within the confines of our practical resources and my limited imagination. The first activity was to make name badges (which were worn fairly religiously throughout the weekend) followed by butterfly cakes and collage butterflies. Then it was time for Tuck Shop which involved a very slippery expedition to the village store. A bit of free time and then lunch and then for reasons not entirely linked to the theme we watched 'Mama Mia' and decorated the butterfly cakes. In the best of Unitarian traditions, the participants were sent to rehearse a short performance for the leaders. Limited cast and audience was a slight hindrance but the effort was commendable.

The two participants, who have their own bedrooms, decided that to accurately emulate Junior Weekend they would need to share a room so that they could chat in bed. So, after a bath and story they retired, giggling, into the 'dorm'.

On Sunday morning our attention turned to caterpillars and we painted sparkly caterpillars inspired by our reading of the Hungry Caterpillar and completed our Hungry Caterpillar jigsaw. Another trip to the Tuck Shop and a tramp through the snow in the woods on a hunt for butterflies (sadly there were no sightings!) and it was time for lunch and departures. At various points throughout the afternoon we were able to reflect on the only benefit of having failed to make it to Junior Weekend, namely the fact that we were already home.

In the circumstances our weekend was a success, but there is no doubt that we will be booking for the October Junior Weekend just as soon as the forms are available.

Rebecca Richards is a Unitarian in Box, Wiltshire.



'Butterflies' was the theme of the Junior Weekend organised by Rebecca Richards when her daughter couldn't get to the Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. Photo by Ali Taylor.

Bicentenary commemoration continues

Don't blame Darwin for the

Cliff Reed argues powerfully that anyone who uses Darwin to set faith and science against each other does a disservice to all three.

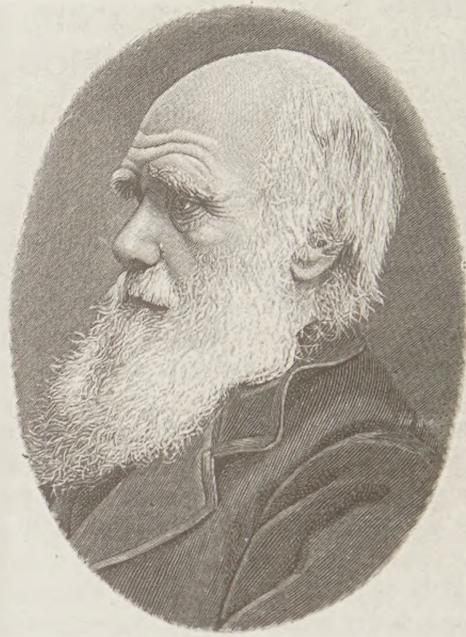
It wasn't Charles Darwin's intention, but perhaps no book ever did as much as 'The Origin of Species' to generate the false idea that science and religion are somehow irreconcilable opposites. Its publication, although welcomed by some religious people – notably Unitarians with the most liberal and radical beliefs – caused great consternation to those who still believed that all species of animal and plant had been created by God exactly as they are now. This was so even if they didn't necessarily think that Genesis chapter one amounted to a literal account of the creation of the world.

The debate provoked by the publication of 'The Origin of Species' was fierce, but there could only be one outcome. So clear, so persuasive and so painstakingly well-researched was Darwin's theory that, by the time Darwin died in 1882, its essential truth was accepted – not only by all scientists but by most religious people too. His body was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey. It is strange, then, that to this day the idea persists that religion and science are in conflict. Why should this be?

Even in Darwin's own time, the biblical account of the origin of the world was widely regarded as, to some extent, mythic or poetic. In Unitarian circles, Joseph Priestley, himself a scientist, of course, had questioned its historical reliability before Darwin was born. And another Unitarian scientist, Sir Charles Lyell, had demonstrated in his 'Principles of Geology' (published in 1830) that the Earth's rocks and geological formations were the result of processes operating over vast periods of time. Therefore the Earth was immeasurably older than the few thousand years worked out from biblical genealogies by Bishop William Paley in the 18th century. Lyell and Darwin were friends and close associates. Lyell was a member of Little Portland Street Unitarian Chapel in London, and Darwin also attended services there from time to time when he was resident in London.

But it wasn't just scientific advances that called into question the reliability of the Bible as an historical record. Biblical scholarship itself was revealing the Scriptures to be a diverse collection of documents, written in different periods by a wide range of authors with different – sometimes contradictory – religious and political agendas. While not removing the Bible's immense value as a source of religious, moral and spiritual teaching, it could no longer be seen as an inerrant and unquestionable authority. With particular reference to the origin of the world and its living creatures, the Genesis creation story could now be seen for what it is, namely, a beautiful and evocative myth about the living, creative power at work in the universal process.

And it also became possible to point out that Genesis contains not one story of creation but two, rather lamely cobbled together. Taken literally, these contradict each other; taken as



myths, however, they simply present us with two alternative commentaries on the same great mystery of who we are and where we came from. Neither is scientific (or pretends to be), but both are of immense value to the human spirit and imagination, and both contain profound truths about the human psyche and our relationship with the Earth. There should be no conflict between science and religion on their account.

Both science and religion are concerned with truth, which is the goal of both the scientific and the religious quests. But they approach truth in different ways and from different directions. They employ different languages. They are, to some extent, concerned with different aspects of truth, just as they address different aspects of ourselves: the rational and the spiritual, the intellectual and the intuitive, the moral and the ethical, the personal and the social, and so on. We are complex beings and the truth we aspire to know is complex too, but its many facets are not in conflict.

To believe that the Earth's infinite diversity of species has evolved from one remote ancestral life form in no way conflicts with the belief that the highest of human aspirations is to love one's neighbour as oneself. Indeed, these beliefs complement each other because they reveal the essential kinship of the whole community of life on Earth. Science and religion combine to reveal our oneness and our interdependence, and both should also combine to find solutions to the great problems that we currently face.

For this to be so, of course, it is necessary for both science and religion to be true to their essential purposes. Science must explore the mechanisms of nature and find ways to apply the knowledge gained to the cause of human welfare. It must not, however, prostitute itself to the narrow pursuit of profit and power, to purposes that imperil and destroy the planet's interdependent web of life. Religion, on the other hand, should concern itself with its root purpose of bringing human beings into relationships and communities of mutual caring and concern – respectful of the creation in which we live and of which we

igion vs. science argument

are a part, humble before the Great Mystery which called us and all things into existence (call it what you will!), and which sustains us in being as long as we ourselves do not violate the relationship.

But religion has another side, as we know all too well: narrow-minded, bigoted, fearful of truths that contradict its prejudices, intolerant, cruel, arrogant in its pathetic claims to possess all truth. Religion of this kind, like science put to destructive and inhuman purposes, is a perverted parody of what it is called to be. When religion and science are seen to be in conflict, it is usually because the religion concerned is too narrow and too shallow, and because the science concerned is similarly blinkered and rigid in its outlook.

Good science and good religion need have no fear of each other because one reveals to us the essential nature of physical reality, while the other enables us to live lovingly and respectfully within it as fellow members of the Commonwealth of Earth or, if you prefer, the Kingdom of God. Of course, both science and religion will throw up challenges for each other to deal with. Perhaps one of the greatest, at the moment, is the relationship between human genetics and human responsibility – the latest manifestation of a much older debate about determinism and free will. But religion and science can and should be partners in this as in other areas of perplexity, working together for an understanding that will benefit us all. To pretend that religion can blithely ignore the discoveries of science is as absurd as to pretend that the discoveries and applications of science have no bearing on the moral and spiritual life of human beings, which is the business of religious communities.

Why is there still a perceived conflict between science and religion 200 years after the birth of Charles Darwin, a century and a half since the publication of 'The Origin of Species'? Because, sadly, there are still too many of us who misunderstand (sometimes wilfully!) the nature and purpose of both; who insist on seeing the universe in compartmentalised and adversarial terms rather than as the multi-faceted but fundamentally harmonious whole that it is.

Ironically, before Darwin's time, far back before the attempted division of knowledge into watertight compartments, what we now call science and religion were seen simply as facets of the same quest. The first European account of the pulmonary circulation of the blood, by Michael Servetus, appeared in his *theological* work, 'The Restoration of Christianity', in 1553. The fate of this innovative religious thinker and scientist was not untypical of that which befalls the challengers of prevailing orthodoxies – he was burnt at the stake as a 'heretic'. For him, though, science and religion were the same thing.

Science is not, of course, a modern invention. Science of a sophisticated nature was practised in ancient civilizations from Egypt to China, from India to Babylon and Greece, and then – via Islamic civilization – back into Europe. But this ancient science was rarely seen as distinct from the religious or spiritual dimension of existence. In the Nativity account in Matthew's gospel we meet three scientists, namely, the 'wise men' or magi who follow the star to Bethlehem. These men were astronomers, astronomy being a much prized science in

When religion and science are seen to be in conflict, it is usually because the religion concerned is too narrow and too shallow, and because the science concerned is similarly blinkered and rigid in its outlook.

ancient times, when it was believed that events in the heavens predicted and paralleled events on Earth.

In India, Babylon and other cultures, astronomers commanded great respect. What today we call astrology was inextricably bound up with astronomy until at least the 16th century, when it was realised that astrology depended on an erroneous understanding of the universe, and it was relegated to the status of a superstition. But while the bathwater of astrology might, quite rightly, have been thrown out, perhaps it was unfortunate that the baby was thrown out with it. This 'baby' was the profound understanding of the universe as an integrated and interrelated whole, something we are now having to rediscover. The reconciliation of science and religion is part of this process.

Darwin is seen by some as having blown science and religion apart, and in a very narrow sense this was the case. But, in fact, he demonstrated that what matters to both is truth. Error, be it in science or religion, *must* give way to it. Only so can either function honestly and effectively for human good.

It is often said that Darwin ceased to be a religious man once his scientific discoveries and personal tragedy had fatally undermined the more conventional (though lukewarm!) faith of his younger days, but this isn't true – if his own testimony is to be believed. It is even said that he became an atheist, something he specifically denied. The religion of his later years was concerned with the realisation of human potential, with establishing a broader universal community than any one sect or tradition could achieve, and with finding oneness with 'the infinite One'¹ – the whole within which all things exist and evolve, and in which the seeming opposites of science and religion are reconciled.

The Rev Cliff Reed is minister at Ipswich.

¹ This term comes from the Fifty Affirmations of the Free Religious Association, drafted by Francis Ellingwood Abbot, of which Darwin wrote in 1871, 'I agree with every word'. The Free Religious Association was, primarily, a grouping of radical American Unitarians to which Darwin gave both moral and financial support during the last ten years of his life. Darwin's enthusiasm for this organisation and its principles really gives a more positive reason to regard him as part of the Unitarian tradition, than his family association with the Wedgwoods. He characterised his own position as being either 'atheist' or 'Agnostic' (which he preferred) and this chimed in well with the free religious humanism of the Fifty Affirmations.

Elspeth Vallance, well-loved minister

Elspeth Rosalind Vallance
1915-2009

By Peter Godfrey

The death of Elspeth Rosalind Vallance on 13 February means the loss of a dear mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, aunt and friend – and of an enthusiastic and devoted life-long Unitarian.

Elspeth was born on 31 August 1915 and she once pointed out that she was 'a third generation Unitarian on both sides.' Her father was the Rev Dr Alfred Hall, author of the 'classic' 'Beliefs of a Unitarian'. Unitarianism was a significant influence on Elspeth from the start of her life.

Elspeth was the youngest of seven children, two boys and five girls. Her eldest brother, Morley, was a vital influence in her early years and she was devastated when he died of septicaemia whilst a student at Oxford. Elspeth bravely faced another tragedy later in life when her daughter, Rachel, died at the age of 4. Martin, Elspeth's other brother, became a Unitarian minister and one of her sisters, Joan, married a Unitarian minister, the late John McLachlan. Elspeth became a Unitarian minister and married one.

Won a place at Oxford

From Sheffield High School, Elspeth won a place at Oxford University where she studied Modern History at St Anne's College. This was followed by the then-traditional full three-year theological course and training for the ministry at Manchester College, Oxford, which Elspeth completed in 1939. Very soon after completing her studies, Elspeth married the Rev Arthur Vallance and became assistant minister at Pendleton, Salford – where Arthur was the minister. It was the beginning of a wonderful 'team' ministry that lasted until Arthur died in 1990. Elspeth and Arthur had endeared themselves to Pendleton folk and – as in all their ministries – there are still people who remember how much 'the Vallances' meant to them or their parents. Rachel was born in Pendleton in 1942 but it was no place for a young family to be during the blitzes, so they moved to Altrincham in 1943.

In Altrincham, Elspeth blossomed as a homemaker. Mark and Stephen were born in 1944 and 1946 but Rachel died of meningitis shortly after Stephen's



Elspeth Vallance, on her motor-cycle in Urmston. She was photographed by a local paper there in summer 1948.

birth. Fortunately, Altrincham's 'parsonage' was large enough for Elspeth's 75-year-old year old parents to be accommodated when Alfred retired and could not afford a house. Elspeth cared for them until they died 10 years later. In addition, Elspeth housed and looked after a cousin, Ruth, who had rheumatoid arthritis and depression. Elspeth not only managed her young family and a full house, she also supported Arthur in his ministry. Nevertheless Elspeth maintained her own independent role. Elspeth travelled all over to take services when asked, and she also undertook a ministry of her own. From 1948 to 1950 and again from 1953 to 1955 Elspeth was minister at Urmston. At this time, and throughout her life, Elspeth excelled in encouraging young people, especially those in the active Unitarian Young People's League branch at Altrincham.

Taught religious education

In 1959 Arthur became minister at Chesterfield. Soon after their move Elspeth discovered that the local Girls' Grammar School needed a part-time religious education teacher. Her applica-

tion for the job was successful and she enjoyed this work immensely, encouraging her young students to think about what was actually written in the Bible. Elspeth's academic training became very useful. When elected National President of the Women's League Elspeth said, far too modestly, that she had 'more enthusiasm than intellect, and circumstances have made my life more practical than academic'.

Enthusiasm drove her

Certainly Elspeth was always, to the end of her life, enthusiastic. Her enthusiasm and indeed intellect made her an excellent president. A major part of her year in office was the organisation of the League's Triennial Conference. Elspeth wrote: 'The subject *The Quality of Life* is relevant to this central belief in love at the heart of things. Life on Planet Earth is at risk. I hope that at this conference we can increase our reverence for life (Albert Schweitzer was a hero of Elspeth's) and discover our role both in co-operation with other conservationists and in new fields of leadership, helping to avert the dangers which threaten the quality of life.' This was 1974 - Elspeth, typically, was well ahead of her time.

While at Chesterfield Arthur had oversight of the chapel at Great Hucklow and when he retired he and Elspeth moved to Hucklow to an old farmhouse they had converted into three two-bedroom flats. At this time Elspeth said 'my hobbies are fell walking and providing coffee etc. for Unitarians and others visiting Great Hucklow.' Many, many people remember their generous hospitality and the special services and events they organised and supported during those years. Their son, Mark, a manufacturer of mountaineering equipment, has lived all his adult life in the Hucklow area.

Started a fellowship

Elspeth and Arthur's younger son, Stephen, a consultant surgeon, moved to Blenheim, on the south island of New Zealand, in 1985 and Arthur and Elspeth moved there in 1987. Though in her 70s, Elspeth was still full of enthusiasm and she soon gathered together a group that became the Marlborough Unitarian Fellowship. Elspeth was also a strong encourager of the Unitarians in Christchurch, a keen supporter of the Sea of Faith in New Zealand and a promoter of

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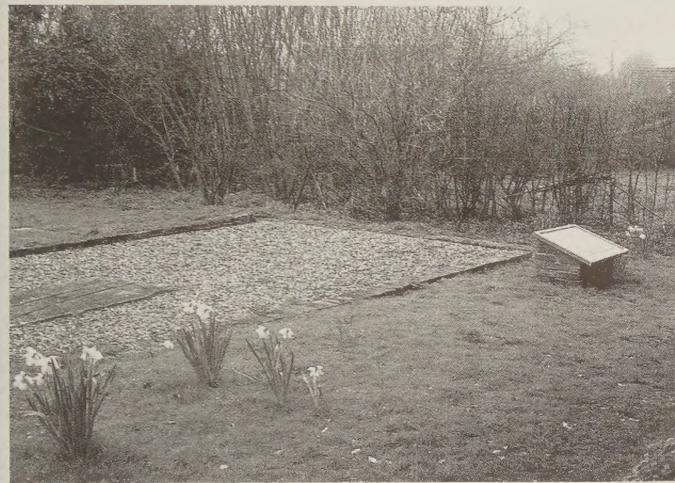
Unitarian heritage continues at Filby

By Rod Voegeli

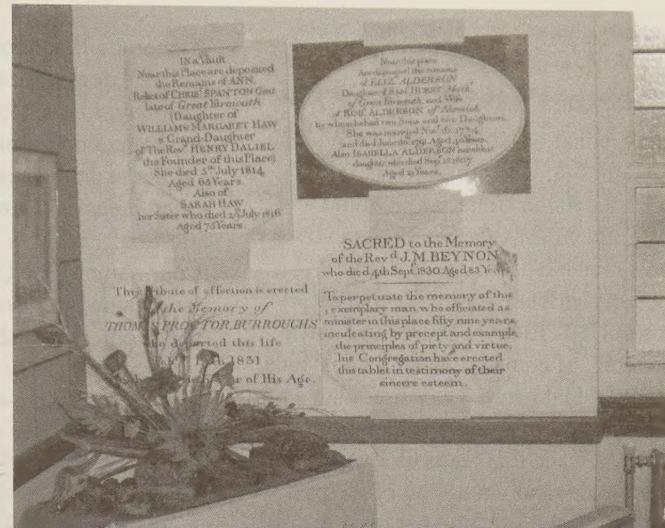
The Unitarian Chapel at Filby near Caister-on-Sea in Norfolk was demolished after severe bomb damage during the Second World War. But the Unitarian heritage is being kept alive by several efforts.

Seven impressive 18th century grave slabs, which were inside the Unitarian Chapel when enemy bombers attacked and destroyed it WW11, were found at the Filby site when it was cleared in 1990. They had been in storage since then. But recently the memorials were taken out of store, cleaned and restored by Great Yarmouth stone-mason Colin Smith. They were then installed at Old Meeting Unitarian Church, Greyfriars Way, Great Yarmouth, where Colin is a member.

The foundations of two successive chapels remain at the Filby site. The first chapel was built in 1709 of brick and flint and was the very first Dissenters' Chapel in Norfolk. This was replaced with a new chapel at the turn of the 20th Century – the one later destroyed by bombs.



A marker explains the history at the site of the first Dissenters' chapel in Norfolk, located at Filby.



Memorial slabs from the Filby Unitarian Chapel now hang in the sanctuary at Great Yarmouth. Photos submitted by Rod Voegeli

The restored memorials are to: Ann Spanton (d.1814) and her sister Sarah Haw (d.1816), daughters of William and Mary Haw and grand-daughters of Henry Daliel, founder of Filby Dissenters Chapel in 1704.

Elizabeth Alderson (d.1791 aged 40 years) daughter of Samuel Hurry of Great Yarmouth, she married Robert Alderson, minister from Norwich in 1784. Also, her daughter Isabella who died in 1807 aged 21 years. The Rev JM Beynon, who officiated at Filby for 59 years and died in 1830, aged 83 years.

Thomas Proctor Burroughs (d.1831)

The annual Open-Air Service to celebrate the Unitarian Heritage in Filby will be held on Sunday 16 August at 3pm conducted by the Rev Christopher Wilson, Associate Minister to the Great Yarmouth congregation.

Rod Voegeli is a member of the Octagon Chapel, Norwich.

Elspeth Vallance is remembered fondly

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interfaith meetings and communication and interaction among religious faiths. Elspeth organised several conferences and was often a key speaker at them. In 1986 in a letter to the Women's League Letter Elspeth wrote: 'When will we ever learn. I write letters to the local newspaper, signed E.V. (Unitarian Minister); in the latest I have pleaded that what we need most at present is Wisdom – personal, local, in world relationships and love in spite of everything. I think of the stars and remember that ours is a very little planet.'

Doug Stafford, a founder member of the Marlborough Fellowship described Elspeth as 'Always full of enthusiasm and wanting to share her 'good news' ... she was a lovely lady, gracious and unique.' This is how Elspeth will be remembered by all who had the good fortune to know her. We shall remember her with much gratitude and deep affection. 'The good heart never dies' – and what a good-hearted person Elspeth was.

The Rev Peter Godfrey is a Unitarian minister living at King's Stanley, Gloucestershire.



The Rev Elspeth Vallance on her last visit to Great Hucklow, home of the Unitarian Nightingale Conference Centre. Photo by Celia Midgley.

Letters to the Editor

Try 'Unitarians' (No, that's not a typo)

In response to Nick Morrice of Godalming, who struggles as I do, with the name Unitarian, I would offer this. Last year, goodness knows how, I received an email from a poverty-stricken (there is no other kind) UNITERIAN church in Kenya, seeking, of course, financial assistance. Look at that name. Does it not have a freshness, a simplicity and an up-to-date message that leads us away from the theological wrangling of the past towards a worthwhile, but distant, goal? I learnt that our faith is growing fast in East Africa, because of its message of tolerance, and because it offers a radical approach to today's problems. Before you can become a *Unitarian*, you have to adopt an AIDS orphan and share with him/her a home and a family, no matter how little you have to share. While we in Britain fail to agree with other churches and each other over exactly how Christian we are, Africans are finding a new faith that offers them hope of a new openness, and the inspiration to tackle the problems of everyday living.

They are doing this without a Unitarian college. Who could afford to go to one anyway? These people are in desperate need of funding. A gift of \$5,000 from the UUA to the New Life Unitarian Primary School in Uganda – a residential school for AIDS orphans – enabled them to build three more classrooms. Here is hope, and growth and love. Together, through the ICUU, we can UNITE to help it along.

Janet Briggs
Glasgow

One writer, two replies

Perhaps Unitarians need missionaries

To the Editor:

Further to Mike Killingworth's letter 'Spiritual growth or palliative care?' (*Inquirer* 21 February), perhaps the GA could train missionaries to set up fellowships in universities and in towns where there is no Unitarian presence.

Don't change our name

To the Editor:

I hope that Nick Morrice's suggestion in *The Inquirer*, 21 February,

'Denomination name should change, evolve', does not catch on. Since the Rev David Usher told us at a recent lay leadership training session that our name denotes our theology, I have found it easier to answer that perennial question: 'What is Unitarianism?' It is our name! The Unity of all things as contained in Darwin's theory of evolution: we all share a common ancestor; our Unity through interdependence; and a more profound spiritual Unity that connects us with all living things.

Beryl Payne
Chatham Unitarians

It's what we do, not what we say we are

To the Editor:

New Name? – NO. It's what we do that matters. It has been structures not names that have evolved.

Peter Whitham
Stockton Unitarians

Bolt-down pews worked in one chapel

I read with interest Martin Littlepage's letter about problems with pew removal at Gellionnen. (*Inquirer*, 21 February). We had a somewhat similar problem at our chapel, where two pews made coffin entry and exit very difficult.

The solution was to convert these two pews from 'fixed' to 'bolt down'. This was done with no change in their appearance, and when a funeral took place they were unbolted and stored in the school room. Unbolting and bolting took five minutes each. Over time, it was realised that, like Gellionnen, we were better off without them, and in practice they never got put back, but the option remained. However, the chapel was not listed so we did not have CADAW breathing down our necks!

Mike Barber
Cefn-y-bedd, Wrexham

Confusion over Trust's remit on churches

To the Editor:

The Rev Mrs Ann Latham's letter (*Inquirer*, December 13) regarding the Historic Chapel's Trust serves to accentuate the confused perceptions widely held about ecclesiastical conservation trusts.

The Historic Chapels Trust (Reg. No. 1017321, founded circa 1993) was set up to provide a facility for '... taking into its ownership redundant chapels and other places of worship in England, which are of outstanding architectural and historic interest.'

This initiative addressed the long-held contention in learned circles since 1969 when the Established Church set up its exclusive preservation trust by statute ('The Redundant Churches Fund' – later renamed 'The Churches Conservation Trust'), that there was an imperative for a sister body to acquire and conserve noteworthy non-Anglican places of worship no longer used for regular worship.

Whilst acknowledging that the best use for any church or chapel is occupancy by congregation(s) (inc. ecumenical or multi-faith partnership tenancies as viability-enhancers to stave off closures), let us try not to lose sight of the fact that we are each variously stewards of our religious heritage.

The classic 'buildings versus mission' issue can only gain intensity amidst the deepening morass of secularist apathy and materialistic domination.

In the professional world of Ecclesiastical Resource Management, both pre-closure and post-closure phases of a congregation's buildings are of interest, and sources of funding and charitable assistance – whether statutory or discretionary, for listed or non-listed properties – are located where appropriate to possibly alleviate the financial pressures on trustees and committees.

Although the Kidderminster New Meeting is not constitutionally eligible for any monies from the Historic Chapels Trust, there are numerous discretionary funding bodies whose Terms of Reference would not summarily disqualify such an application. The essence of success in attracting financial support lies in two things: 1) cogence, and 2) succinctness (of narrative) on the application form. I wish Kidderminster's faithful membership well at this time.

David E Gillman
Leicester
Coventry Great Meeting House

Destructive faith revealed in 'Lake'

David Morgan reviews a film which examines the striking role misogyny and the Bible play in US abortion politics, and hopes religious liberals can make a difference

'You're in a room with Hitler and an abortionist, and you have a gun with only two bullets. What do you do?' – 'You shoot the abortionist twice.' This grisly 'joke' provides one of the milder shocks in Tony Kaye's 'Lake of Fire', a two-hour documentary exploring how abortion has become one of the most divisive social issues in America today.

Kaye, the director of 'American History X', spent 16 years gathering material for 'Lake of Fire', and it benefits greatly from the historical perspective: early on, we see anti-abortion activist Paul Hill using the language of Revelation 20:15 to berate his pro-choice opponents at a demonstration, threatening them with eternal torment in the lake of fire. ('Oh no!' they reply in pantomime tones, 'Not the lake of fire!') As the film progresses, Hill campaigns on behalf of Michael Griffin, who shot Dr David Gunn as 'punishment' for performing abortions; when Griffin is found guilty of murder, Hill denounces the verdict as a travesty. A journalist asks, 'Can we expect to see you on trial for murder soon?' Hill's silence turns out to be ominous, since we learn later that went on to murder two doctors, one of whom had long made it a rule to wear a bulletproof vest to work. Hill was sentenced to death twice by a Florida court. Hill's 'supporters' seemed to want his execution to go ahead (as it did), in hopes martyrdom was the most useful service he could provide.

'Lake of Fire' has no voiceover: the interviewees simply have their say – or, in the case of the more outlandish religious zealots, are given enough rope to hang themselves. The Bible remains a force to be reckoned with in American politics, on this subject as much as with homosexuality or the death penalty. The take-home impression (if not exactly the message) of this film is that the pro-choice movement is made up of wise, humane (and largely irreligious) people who have some practical knowledge of what they are talking about, while the pro-lifers seem to be almost solidly religious fanatics and bigots whose opposition to abortion – and whose religion itself – is apparently a symptom of serious mental disorder. One could wonder how far this reflects the true situation.

We meet many expert witnesses along the path – some famous, some not: Nat Hentoff bucks the trend as a civil libertarian and atheist, who condemns abortion. Peter Singer points out that anti-abortion legislation will only mean that rich women fly abroad to private clinics, while the poor revert to the ghastly backstreet methods. Bill Baird describes those often-fatal methods in unflinching detail. Noam Chomsky condemns the pro-lifers' apparent apathy over the 15 million children in the developing world who die of preventable diseases every

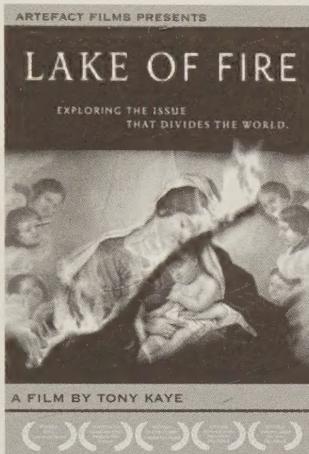
year. The Gothic heavy-rocker 'Dutchess' [sic] proves articulate and wise in interviews. But her stage act includes doing unmentionable things with a wire coat-hanger while wearing only thigh-high boots, a thong and two pieces of duct tape. Ex-nurse Emily Lyons, now scarred and wheelchair-bound after surviving an Atlanta clinic bombing. ('They threaten me with the lake of fire ... but I've already been there') Martha McCorvey, who (as 'Jane Roe') was the focus of the landmark 1973 court case, 'Roe v Wade', has since 'found Jesus' and deplores her own part in having made abortion legal in America.

More memorable than any of this, however, is when we follow 28-year-old Stacey on her visit to an abortion clinic. We witness her abortion taking place – one of three places in the film where we see footage of this kind, and where the use of black and white only slightly mitigates the harrowing impact on the viewer. Later that same day, Stacey talks about her feelings: 'Tired, drained emotionally ... need a smoke (weary laugh) ... I dunno ... lots of thoughts ... a little relieved ... now it's time to just ...' – and with that, her composure deserts her, and she breaks down in tears. Like Claude Lanzmann in the making of *Shoah*, Tony Kaye clearly felt that the public good required him to keep the camera rolling when the interviewee, and the audience, might long for him to turn it off. At last, Stacey is helped to a box of tissues, and carries on: 'It's just been really lonely – I just need to get on with my life. I know I made the right decision, but it's still not easy.'

As all good documentaries should, *Lake of Fire* sets the viewer's mind a-bustle for days and weeks after viewing it, provoking thoughts that go far beyond the film's overt material. My own penny-ha'penny-worth is that I felt a greater awareness of the bullying, misogynistic bias of so much conservative religion, and hence of the urgent need for religious liberals to meet the spiritual hunger of our times with more humane alternatives. Can we end the 'trench warfare' between the dogmatic exponents of the pro-life and pro-choice positions, in which one is obliged to support either the rights of the mother or the rights of the child? My naïve hope is that people of goodwill on both sides might learn to say to each other, 'We recognise that you have good humanitarian reasons for taking the stand that you do. We are all united in wishing that abortion would never happen; so, what practical steps can we take towards achieving that?'

The BBFC should be commended for granting *Lake of Fire* an 'E' certificate (exempt from classification), as this means parents can judge whether their sons and daughters would benefit from seeing it. The film cannot necessarily be recommended to every woman (let alone girl) contemplating an abortion; but it should be required viewing for all whose pastoral or professional duties oblige them to deal with the issues it raises. It is not a film for the easily shocked, nor for those who are content to remain within their long-held prejudices; but since when did Unitarians fall into those categories?

David Morgan is a member of Golders Green Unitarians. Lake of Fire by Tony Kaye, 153 mins, B&W. Available on DVD from Artefact Films (www.artefactmedia.com)



Padiham confronted prejudice with prayer

By Jean McNeile

The last few years have seen much controversy in the Town of Padiham over the Women's World Day of Prayer, as ministers in the town decided it was wrong for Unitarians to take part in the annual service – even though it was the Unitarian minister, the Rev Denise Boyd who, over 25 years ago, introduced the service to the town.

But in 2008, the vicar of the Anglican church and the Baptist church minister contacted the chairperson of Women's World Day of Prayer UK and stated that the town of Padiham would no longer take part in the women's service.

In response to that, the Unitarian minister and her congregation of Nazareth Unitarian Chapel considered that the town may wish to continue with a women's service. So, the Rev Jean McNeile contacted various groups and organisations in the town and surrounding areas offering a chance for all wom-

en – regardless of their particular faith – to join her in worship on Friday, 20 February.

Nearly 40 females attended. Their ages ranged from 13 to ladies in their 80s. Six women contributed with prayers, poetry, readings and a meditation. Candles were lit in honour of women in the world. Many women came forward offering prayers for women who are carers, healers and mothers. Thoughts and prayers were also offered for those women who live in fear of violence and abuse.

A light supper was served afterwards, which gave the congregation time to meet and share in friendship and commonality. The Rev McNeile suggested that Padiham might continue to have an annual women's service, possibly using a different church or chapel each year.

The Rev Jean McNeile is minister at Nazareth Unitarian Chapel, Padiham.

News in brief

Transylvanians elect new bishop



Béla Benczédi Ferenc was elected the 31st bishop of the Unitarian Church in Transylvania by the Synod of the denomination on December 6. He was born in 1952 in the city of Segesvár in central Transylvania, and spent his youth in Székelyudvarhely. He graduated from the Protestant Theological School of Kolozsvár in 1975. First he was an intern in the Unitarian Church of Marosvásárhely, then he served as a minister of a village congregation, Désfalva, in rural Transylvania for 18 years. In 1981 he married Benczédi Réka, they have two children.

In 1994, he was called the minister of the oldest Unitarian congregation in the world, the one in Kolozsvár, which he has served over the past 14 years. The installation ceremony of Bishop Béla Benczédi was to be held on March 6 in the Unitarian Church of Kolozsvár.

New edition of 'The Unitarians'

Blackstone Editions, Providence, Rhode Island has recently published a new edition of Len Smith's book, 'The Unitarians: A Short History'. Intended primarily for the USA and Canada, it will also keep the work available in the UK and internationally. The text is substantially the same as for the first edition, but with some corrections, modifications and additions. Chapters have been slightly reordered, US literary conventions adopted, new illustrations added, and – to make it a truly global study

– there is a new section about both established and emergent Unitarianism in Africa and Asia.

Charles H. Howe said of 'The Unitarians': This well-written book represents a much-needed, general, up to date history of the Unitarian movement. It covers the whole scope of the subject in a way not achieved since Earl Morse Wilbur's comprehensive two-volume history was completed in 1952.

Single copies can be purchased in the UK from Lensden Publishing, 63 Silverdale Road, Arnside, Cumbria, LA5 0DZ. Telephone: 01524 762264 E-mail: DrLenSmith@lensden.fsnet.co.uk £16 + £1.50 postage and packing. Cheques payable to 'L. Smith'. Discounted bulk purchases for churches, organisations and bookshops should be made on the Blackstone Editions' website.

FSA could help churches

The Foundation for Sport and the Arts provides grant money for arts-related expenses in churches – including – but not limited to – organs, induction loops, or PA systems. The foundation is wrapping up its activities by 2012 and will accept the last of its applications at the end of March. See www.thefsa.net for more information.

GA president visits Lindsey's grave



GA President Joyce Ashworth was unable to attend the Theophilus Lindsey pilgrimage, held in November to mark the 100th anniversary of his death. So, she headed to London's Bunhill Fields Cemetery in January to pay her respects at the renowned Unitarian theologian.